

# FACT SHEET



## Le Mars Coal Gas Site Le Mars, Iowa

August 2000

### INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 continues to investigate contamination at the Le Mars Coal Gas Site, 331 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE, Le Mars, Iowa. The 1.6-acre site is occupied by the Le Mars Street Department and consists of an office and maintenance shop building, two storage buildings, and a shed. A gas pump and two underground storage tanks are also located on the site property.

### SITE BACKGROUND

In the early part of the last century, natural gas was not available in many parts of the country until pipelines were constructed. In areas where natural gas was not available, local utility companies used a process for turning coal into a gas. The manufactured gas, known as producer gas or town gas, was used as a clean burning fuel for lighting and heating. During gas production, by-products such as coal tar were produced. Some compounds found in coal tar are hazardous materials that can cause health and environmental problems if handled improperly. Examples of compounds formed during the manufacture of coal gas include polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, cyanide, and phenols.

The Le Mars Former Manufactured Gas Plant (FMGP) was constructed by the Le Mars Gas Light Company in 1884. The Le Mars Gas Company acquired the facility in 1898 and expanded operations. In 1939, the facility converted from manufactured gas to natural gas and operations at the FMGP ceased. The Iowa Public Service Company owned the FMGP from 1942 until it was acquired by C. W. Miller in 1953. The current owner, the city of Le Mars, has owned the property since 1967.

### PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

During the early 1990s, sampling was conducted at the site due to the presence of underground storage tanks and the need to meet underground storage tank insurance requirements. In 1995, during the installation of three ground water monitoring wells, coal tar contamination was discovered unexpectedly and the site was referred to EPA's

Superfund program.

Subsequent sampling by EPA, most recently in January 2000, indicates that the FMGP appears to be a source of contamination in the shallow ground water. This contamination extends west-northwest from the intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE toward Central Avenue. Soil contamination has also been found at the site and in the subsurface at least 100 feet to the north and northwest of the site.

## **FIELD ACTIVITIES**

EPA will install additional ground water monitoring wells, mainly in the area northwest of the site, beginning the week of August 7, 2000. The primary purpose of installing and sampling the additional monitoring wells includes:

- ▶Determining the vertical and horizontal extent of the ground water contamination.
- ▶Obtaining more information on the geology and hydrogeology around the site.
- ▶Determining the potential for the contamination to migrate to the two municipal wells located less than ½ mile northwest of the site.

EPA will also conduct additional sampling of surface and subsurface soils on and adjacent to the site. Sediment samples will be taken along the drainage ditch north of the site, in Willow Creek downstream of the drainage ditch, and in the Floyd River downstream of Willow Creek. The monitoring well installation and sampling of ground water, soil, and sediment is expected to take three weeks to complete.

EPA will review the data from this investigation and determine what actions, if any, should be taken at the site.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

If you have questions about this fact sheet, or need additional information regarding this site, please contact:

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